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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000140

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TAGS: PROG PREL KS KN

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ROH DISCUSSES KIM JONG-IL, THE SIX-PARTY
TALKS AND RECIPROCITY WITH A/S HILL

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a January 9 meeting with Assistant
Secretary Hill, Roh thanked President Bush, Secretaries

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Powell and Rice, and A/S Hill for their efforts with respect
to the bilateral alliance and in keeping the Six Party Talks
(6PT) on track, and said he remained encouraged about the
future of the 6PT after hearing A/S Hill's status report.
President Roh said he found himself hoping for the continued
health of Kim Jong-il, as without him the DPRK would have no
"responsible" negotiators. Instead of rational thinkers
capable of making bold decisions, the DPRK, Roh said, was
filled with officials who were only concerned about proving
their loyalty to the regime by taking a hard line. Roh
believed that Kim Jong-il has sufficient control of his
military to press through his policies over their objections.

Roh also expressed surprise that, while a recent Korean poll
showed a majority of South Koreans supporting engagement with
North Korea, a majority also supported basing such engagement
on a policy of reciprocity (the guiding principle for
President-elect Lee Myung-bak). END SUMMARY.

THANKING USG

¶2. (C) Roh began the 45-minute meeting by expressing special
appreciation for A/S Hill's efforts to move the Six-Party
process forward. He commented that history showed that
individuals had the capacity to create positive change.
After hearing A/S Hill's update on the status of the talks,
Roh said he remained encouraged about the prospects for
Six-Party success.

¶3. (C) Roh stated that, while there was sometimes discord in
the U.S.-ROK relationship, he was "very grateful" for
President Bush's efforts to find ways to bridge the
differences in opinions between the two sides. Confessing
that he felt a "certain fondness for his U.S. counterparts,"
Roh praised President Bush for his "considerate
understanding" and Secretaries of State Powell and Rice for
"their thoughtful and positive approach." Roh said that,
while the different backgrounds and interests of the two
countries often produced different foreign policy positions,
the U.S. and the ROK had worked together successfully in the
Six-Party Talks to forge a common approach.

ROH GLAD KIM JONG-IL ALIVE...

14. (C) Claiming that "rationalism" outside of Kim Jong-il had collapsed in the DPRK, Roh said that he took comfort in the fact that Kim Jong-il was still alive to negotiate on behalf of the DPRK. Other North Korean leaders might be worse, Roh claimed, and without Kim, all channels of negotiation might disappear. In Roh's opinion, Kim was the only North Korean leader who was flexible and capable of making bold decisions during negotiations. Kim's advisors and officials, on the other hand, appeared interested only in demonstrating their loyalty to the regime, avoiding responsibility, and taking a hard line. In this context, Roh said he found it ironic that he was hoping for the continued health of Kim Jong-il.

15. (C) Asked by A/S Hill whether Kim Jong-Il controlled the military, Roh stated that he believed Kim could maintain control over the North Korean military even in cases where he had to override their opposition. North Korean military tradition provides that the military could advocate their point of view, but that ultimately it could not question Kim's authority after he made a political decision. This boded well for the Six-Party Talks, Roh said.

16. (C) Roh cited three reasons for North Korea's behavior toward the outside world. First, there was the rigidity of North Korean society. Second, the peculiar nature of North Korea's negotiating tactics made brinksmanship their most common approach to any negotiation. Third, an enormous sense of mistrust toward the outside world colored their perspective. As a result, North Korea did not like to resolve all of the outstanding issues during a single meeting, but instead preferred to divide up the problems into smaller parts, and thus obtain more concessions while preserving their leverage for future negotiations. Roh said that he believed the North Koreans were the toughest

negotiators in the world. In response, A/S Hill said that he was pleased to have similarly tough South Korean negotiators on his side for the 6PT.

...PUZZLED BY SK SUPPORT FOR NK RECIPROCITY

17. (C) Roh expressed surprise that, while polls showed that a majority of South Korean citizens supported engagement with North Korea, a majority also backed a policy of reciprocity in engaging with the DPRK. (NOTE: Reciprocity is the watchword of President-elect Lee Myung-bak's approach to North Korea, whereas President Roh has consistently rejected the concept. END NOTE) While reciprocity was a fine idea in an abstract sense, Roh said, practically speaking it was difficult to implement. North and South Korea had different situations and measured reciprocity by different yardsticks. Timing for reciprocal actions could also be problematic: reciprocal actions could be measured in either months or years, Roh noted.

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